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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet outlines Sweden's policies of government-supported child care and parental insurance provisions. Swedish families receive: (1) free maternity and child health care; (2) child allowances for each child of 9,000 krona per year through age 16; (3) up to 450 days of paid parental leave for the birth of a child, with 360 days paid at 90 percent of the parent's normal pay rate; and (4) up to 60 days of paid leave per year to take care of a sick child. Child care in Sweden is considered a public responsibility, and is financed by the state, local municipalities, and parental fees. Parents sending their children to part-time preschools and part-time group care pay no fees, while day care centers, family day care centers, and leisure centers for school-age children receive partial state subsidies. Early childhood curriculum, staff training, and programs for special needs and immigrant children are also discussed. Tables provide statistical information about the distribution of preschool child care, the cost distribution of public child care, state subsidies to public child care, and the percentage of children in various child care arrangements. (MDM)

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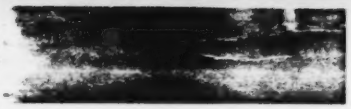

Child Care in Sweden

ED 367 491

Fact Sheets on Sweden

A family policy which protects the child and its rights is regarded as very important in Sweden. Among its aims and measures can be mentioned public child care for children between the ages of eighteen months and six/seven years and leisure time centres for younger schoolchildren aged 6/7–12. The family policy pursued by the new government is aimed at giving parents of infant children more freedom of choice, so that they can make the child care arrangements which they themselves prefer.

Other important provisions for families with children are free maternity and child health care, child allowances, and a system of parental insurance whereby the parents receive compensation for loss of income when they stay at home to look after babies and sick children. There is also legislation against corporal punishment in the home, in the pre-school and at school. In the event of a divorce, there is a law giving the child access to both parents.

Hitherto Swedish children have started school at the age of seven, but Parliament has now passed a resolution requiring all municipalities, not later than 1997, to offer children the option of starting at six if their parents so desire. Few children as yet have actually started school at six.

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High demand for child care

Swedish women have one of the highest employment rates in the western world—around 80% of all Swedish women with children under the age of seven are gainfully employed. However, it should be pointed out that an unusually large number work part-time. They also have a high birth rate, 2.14 per woman in 1990, which is the fourth highest figure in Europe. Since 1983, nativity has risen faster in Sweden than in any other western country. Many Swedish women complete their education and find jobs before having children. First-time mothers are on average 27 years old. Children, when they arrive, are often closely spaced. In recent decades it has become normal practice for most women to retain their jobs after having babies which they are entitled to by law. Sweden has separate taxation of spouses, an equality-promoting measure based on the principle that each individual should be financially independent.

It is clear that families with children have special needs. One is for a parental insurance system which enables parents to stay at home to care for babies and sick children without being financially disadvantaged. Another is high-quality care for young children when their parents are at work. To meet this need, a system of public child care has been developed in Sweden which aims to enable parents to combine parenthood with professional work or studies as well as to meet children's need for support and development.

Population 1990		8.6 million
No. of children	0–6	764,864
No. of children	7–9	288,945
No. of children	10–12	294,499

Parental Insurance

The parental insurance system is based on the principle of compensation for loss of income for parents staying at home to look after a child. Most parents first come into contact with the parental insurance system in connection with the birth of a child. For children born after 1 October 1988, parents receive benefit for a period of 450 days. For the first 360 days, the amount received is approx. 90% of the parent's normal income. For the final 90 days, a standard amount of SEK 60 per day is paid.

This benefit can be utilised in various ways. It can be used by one parent to stay at home full-time, or it can be combined with part-time working, in which case, the parent receives a combination of salary from the employer and benefit from the insurance system. Payment of benefit may be deferred until the child's eighth birthday, at latest.

Furthermore, fathers are entitled to ten day's leave of absence with parental benefit when a child is born, even if the mother is receiving parental benefit at the same time and for the same child.

A woman having another child before the previous one is 2 1/2 years old receives parental benefit equalling, at least, the amount she received when the previous child was born. In other words, it is possible for a woman to retain full-time benefit if she was employed full time before the first baby was born, even if she has only worked part time in between the two confinements.

The parental insurance system also provides compensation for loss of income when one of the parents stays at home to care for a sick child (max. 60 days annually per child up to the age of 12). Parents with children aged between 4 and 12 are also entitled to take two days off work per child and year, with compensation for loss of income, to take part in parental education or visit the child's pre-school, leisure time centre or school.

One of the ideas behind parental insurance is that it should be shared between the mother and the father. Fathers have steadily increased their number of benefit days during the child's first year of life. Most of the benefit period, however, is still taken by mothers. When it comes to caring for children when they are ill, however, fathers seem nowadays to take almost as much responsibility as mothers.

Parents also receive a child allowance for children under the age of 16. Young persons aged between 16 and 18 and continuing their education receive a student grant at the same rate as child allowance. Families with three or more children receive a supplementary allowance. These are universal benefits, independent of income. At present, the child allowance is SEK 9,000 per child per year.

Responsibility for public child care

The Swedish Parliament (*Riksdagen*) legislates in matters concerning the aims, expansion and financing of child care. The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (*Socialdepartementet*) is responsible for the preparation of laws and proposals related to child care. The National Board of Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*) and the county administrations are together responsible for supervising the pre-schools and other forms of child care nationwide. This involves, for example, disseminating information, providing guidance, helping to develop skills, following up the quality and contents of the work of the pre-schools, and the planned expansion of services.

Main day-to-day responsibility for public child care is borne by the country's 286 municipalities. These supervise the expansion, running and development of day care centres, part-time groups, family day care, open pre-schools and leisure time centres.

Forms of child care

Child care services in Sweden take a number of different forms. Pre-school (*förskola*) is the general term used to denote day care centres, part-time groups and open pre-schools.

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Table 1. The distribution of pre-school child care (January 1991)

All pre-school children aged 3 months–6 years	Number	Percent
Child care outside the home, of which	405,000	55
Municipal day care centre	248,000	34
Municipal family day care	102,000	14
Private or parent-cooperative day care centre	13,000	2
Other private paid care	22,000	3
Private unpaid care (incl. part-time group)	20,000	3
Cared for solely by parents (incl. part-time group), of whom	326,000	45
Parent is municipal child minder	25,000	3
Mother or father on parental leave	179,000	24
Single, gainfully employed/studying parent	2,000	–
Unemployed parent	12,000	2
Parent working at home	43,000	6
Other	10,000	1
No data	1,000	–

Source: Statistics Sweden.

Day care centres (*daghem*) care for children aged 1–6 years whose parents are gainfully employed or studying, as well as those children who need extra support for their development. Day care centres are usually open between 6.30 in the morning and 18.00 in the evening, Monday to Friday, all year round. Children are divided into mixed-age groups, since it is considered valuable for them to grow up together with children of other ages. These groups are made up of either small children up to the age of three, sibling groups (usually 3 to 6 years), or extended sibling groups which can include children of all pre-school ages as well as younger schoolchildren. This mixed-age grouping means that the children do not have to change groups as often as they would do otherwise and it creates greater stability. Children used to be grouped according to age, and a partial reversion to that arrangement is now being contemplated. Mixed-age groups, however, are by far the commonest practice. The average day care centre will have four groups or sections, each with some 15–18 children. Each section will usually have three members of staff, two pre-school teachers (*förskollärare*) and one child care attendant (*barnskötare*) or one pre-school teacher and two attendants.

Part-time groups (*deltidsgrupper*), which cater for children aged 4–6, follow the school year and usually comprise 20 children, one pre-school teacher and one child care attendant. These groups normally meet for three hours daily, morning or afternoon.

The activities of the open pre-school (*öppen förskola*) are targeted at pre-school children, without any other kind of pre-school place, who attend a few times a week in the company of a parent or family child minder. A pre-school teacher is employed to organise activities and to give parents and child minders help and advice.

There is also municipal provision for older children with working parents. Leisure time centres (*fritidshem*) are for schoolchildren aged 6/7–12 and are open before and after school as well as during the school holidays. Two members of staff, often recreation instructors (*fritidspedagoger*) and child care attendants, usually work with groups of 15–20 children.

Family day care (*familjedaghem*) is the system by which the municipality employs family child minders (*dagbarnvårdare*) to care for children aged 1–12 years in the minder's own home. The National Board of Health and Welfare recommends that no more than four children, apart from the child minder's own, shall be registered with one family child minder. However, it is not uncommon for this recommendation to be exceeded. The Board has drawn up general guidelines for the work of family day care.

SEK 1 (Swedish krona) = USD 0.17 or GBP 0.09

The availability of public child care

Public child care is regulated by the Social Services Act. This act requires the municipalities to study child care need and to draw up plans for how this need is to be met.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the expansion of public child care was seen as the most important element of Sweden's family policy and was given priority. In 1985, Parliament decided that public child care was to be expanded so that by 1991 all pre-school children over the age of eighteen months would be provided for. This target has not yet been fully achieved. During recent years there has been a steady increase in the number of private day nurseries and leisure time centres and new forms of management have been introduced (such as parent cooperatives). During 1991, personnel cooperatives and day care centres run by the Church of Sweden also became eligible for State grants.

As a result of new policy decisions which took effect in January 1992, State grants are now payable for a wider range of alternatives. In addition, de-restriction of start-ups has made it possible for private day nurseries and leisure time centres to be established and operated on new lines, e.g. as unregistered firms, limited companies or non-profit housing utilities. This is part of the Government's strategy for closing the gap between supply and demand more rapidly.

In January 1991, 48% of all children in the age group 3 months–6 years had a place in public child care—71% of these in day care centres and 29% in family day care. Many children and their parents or child minders regularly visit the open pre-schools, of which there were 1,450 in 1991.

Nearly all six-year-olds have places in day care centre, family day care or part-time group if they have not already started school. In the autumn term 1991, 76 municipalities could offer six-year-olds the option of starting school. In most such municipalities, the children concerned are in regular first-year classes.

Financing public child care

Public child care in Sweden is jointly financed by the state, the municipalities and parental fees. The distribution of costs between these three parties is shown in Table 2. The various types of subsidy for child care which the municipalities receive from the state are given in Table 3. The 1991 budget bill proposes that approx. SEK 13 billion be provided by the state for child care in the financial year 1991/92.

Parental fees

Parental fees are paid per child enrolled in the day care centre, leisure time centre or family day care. The open pre-school and the part-time groups for 6 year olds are free of charge. Different municipalities charge different fees. These are normally income-related and take into consideration the number of children in a family who are enrolled in child care.

Other child care solutions

The 1991 election gave Sweden a non-socialist government. The family policy pursued by this new government is aimed at giving parents of infant children more freedom of choice, so that they can make the childcare arrangements which they themselves prefer. Outside the home there must be good-quality childcare for those who want it, while those preferring to stay at home while their children are small must be given better economic chances of doing so.

As a first step in this direction, impediments to the free establishment and use of different forms of childcare are being eliminated. Childcare grants are being linked to parental preference.

The second step—financial support for families with infant children, so as to give them greater freedom of choice and to establish fairness between them—will be taken when government finance permits.

During recent years, interest in starting non-municipal day care centres and leisure time centres has increased. In 1991, however, pri-

Table 2. Cost distribution of public child care. Average annual cost per child, in SEK and percent (1990)

	State subsidies	Parental fees*	Municipality (net costs)	Total costs
Day care centre	31,700 (40%)	8,200 (11%)	38,400 (49%)	78,300
Part-time group	3,300 (17%)	–	16,000 (83%)	19,400
Leisure time centre	14,000 (31%)	4,400 (10%)	26,400 (59%)	44,800
Family day care	10,400 (23%)	7,000 (15%)	27,800 (62%)	45,200

* Vary according to municipality and parental income.

Source: Swedish Association of Local Authorities.

Table 3. State subsidies to public child care (from January 1991)

Day care centre:	per 15 children	SEK 475,000
	of which for children with special needs	SEK 20,000
	of which for staff further training	SEK 30,000
In addition:		
	for each section open at night	SEK 150,000
	for each section with extended hours*	SEK 75,000
Leisure time centre:	per 15 children	SEK 185,000
	of which for open activities**	SEK 25,000
	of which for children with special needs	SEK 20,000
	of which for staff further training	SEK 10,000
Part-time group:	per 15 children	SEK 50,000
Open pre-school:	(open min. 3 days per week)	SEK 50,000
Family day care:	for children attending at least 7 hours/day	SEK 18,000
	for children attending under 7 hours/day	SEK 8,000

* Sections open at least 3 hours longer than usual (6.30–18.00), Mon–Fri.
** Open to children not enrolled at the centre, e.g. older schoolchildren, children in family day care.

vate establishments still account for only a minor portion of total childcare amenities in Sweden, viz. 5.2% of all children attending day nursery and leisure time centre.

The financing of the non-municipal day care centres and leisure time centres varies from one municipality to another. Parental fees are often set according to the same scale used by the municipality. In parent cooperatives, (the most common form of non-municipal child care arrangement), parents help to run activities, thereby reducing the fees.

An alternative form of child care is the so-called Uppsala Model, according to which parents, working as family child minders, receive payment if they look after both their own and other people's children. This practice has been adopted by a small number of municipalities.

Pedagogic programmes for pre-schools and leisure time centres

A pedagogic programme for the pre-school appeared in 1987. A programme with the same aims for leisure time centres followed in 1988. The aim behind a common programme for all the pre-schools and leisure time centres in the country is:

— to achieve good, even quality;
— to stimulate further development;
— to facilitate planning, supervision, evaluation and development at both municipal level and in the pre-schools and leisure time centres themselves.

The aims and responsibilities of the pre-school can be summarised as follows:

— Its work shall be so planned that it pursues set, pedagogic targets.
— Pre-school children shall receive good, secure and loving care and a sense of community. They shall be given specific support in developing their own personality and skills. They will be helped to increase their awareness of their own identity, and they will be fostered in democratic values.
— The pre-school is designed for all children but has particular responsibility for those who need special help with their development.
— The pre-school shall complement the home and the child's other social and cultural environments. It shall also enable parents to combine parenthood and family life with gainful employment or studies. Activities shall be planned in close cooperation with the parents.

Content and methods

Children learn by exploring, discovering and cultivating their own experiences. Everyday situations, children's games and adult work, as well as contacts with their immediate surroundings are utilised as natural situations for learning and development. The activities of the pre-schools should be based largely on the children's life situation, their interests, previous experiences and special needs. Together with the parents, one of the tasks of the pre-school is to integrate the child into society. This requires a good pedagogic plan.

The work in pre-schools covers the following main areas: cultural activities such as language, drama, music and art, painting and pottery; nature orientation, and community life. These topics manifest themselves naturally through play, creative activities, daily tasks, etc. In order to help children see the context of their activities, work is often based on themes such as "how we live", "what we eat", "fear", the seasons, festivities, etc.

There are daily outdoor activities throughout the year. Children go out into the countryside to learn about flowers, berries, mushrooms, trees and animals. Ice skating, cross-country skiing and swimming may also be included in the week's activities.

The director or supervisor (*förestndare*) of the pre-school is responsible for the regular planning of the centre's work. The staff work in teams, where the particular knowledge and interests of each member of staff can be utilised. Parents should have the opportunity to influence planning and are thus encouraged to participate in activities whenever possible. Each year, plans for the work of the centre and for the in-service training of staff must be sent to the municipal administration.

Staff and training

Pre-schools are staffed by teachers and child care attendants, while recreation instructors and child care attendants work in leisure time centres. In the extended sibling groups, pre-school teachers, recreation instructors and child care attendants work together with both pre-school and schoolchildren.

The training for pre-school teachers and recreation instructors takes the form of university courses of two and a half years' duration. The courses are reduced by six months if the student is already a trained child care attendant. The latter are trained on special two-year study lines in the upper secondary school. There are also special courses, such as those for bilingual persons wanting to work primarily with immigrant children.

In family day care, most family child minders have taken an introductory course of 90–100 hours or a lengthier training, for example the child care attendant's course.

Since responsibility for further training rests with the municipalities, the availability and content of such opportunities can vary enormously from one area to another. To emphasise the importance of further training, the government has included money for this purpose in the state subsidy system.

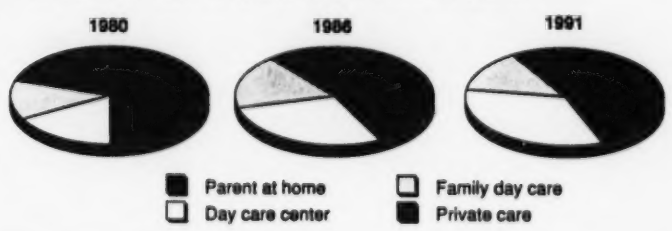
Special support

The aim of public child care is that it should be available to all children whose parents so wish. As long as there are insufficient places, however, children in need of special support for their development shall, in accordance with the Social Services Act, be given priority in the allocation of pre-school places. This is to facilitate the integration of these children into society and to help them live as normal a life as possible. A further intention is to give their families extra support.

Into this category come children who are physically or mentally disabled, children who have a hearing or speech impairment, as well as those with social and psychological problems. Today, an increasing number of children in need of special support are being integrated into ordinary municipal day care instead of remaining in special groups.

Integrating children with disabilities makes special demands. Additional staff may be need-

Child care, children aged 0–6 years, 1980, 1986 and 1991, percent



Size and structure of children's groups at day care centres

	Age	Number of children	Staff ratio
infant group	1-3 years	10-12 children	2 full-time staff members per 5 children
sibling group	3-6 years	15-18 children	1 full-time staff member per 5 children
extended sibling group	1-12 years	15-18 children	same as infant or sibling groups

Source: National Board of Health and Welfare

ed or the size of the group may have to be reduced. In some cases it is judged to be better for the child to remain in his home surroundings. In such cases a parent may receive a care allowance to stay at home and look after the child.

Children in hospital

The Social Services Act also entitles children in hospital to play activities corresponding to those which would otherwise be available to them in pre-schools or leisure time centres. Pre-school teachers who work in hospitals have often completed a specialist training course.

Immigrant children

Nearly 15% of children attending Swedish child care institutions, grow up with two languages and a dual cultural identity. In addition to the special support enjoined by the Social Services Act, pre-school education has the task of laying the foundations of active bilingualism and a secure cultural identity for immigrant and refugee children. Developments in this field will be kept under observation by the National Board of Health and Welfare.

According to the act, children needing support owing to differences in linguistic and/or cultural background are offered places in the municipal child care system on a priority basis. The number of immigrant and refugee children attending day care centres, play schools and family day care, as reflected by municipal State grant applications for 1991, was 44,464 (nearly 50% more than for 1990).

Upwards of 16,000 children, i.e. about 36% of all immigrant and refugee children, received home-language support during the first half of 1991. Home-language support is given in some 60 languages. Participation is voluntary.

Special measures for immigrant and refugee children qualify for State grants. A new system of State grants for immigrant and refugee children in the child care sector was introduced in 1991. Retroactive State grants are being paid to the municipalities for children receiving home-language support (four hours per week for the maximum rate) during the first half of 1991, while for the second half of 1991 grants are payable for all children with home languages other than Swedish who are enrolled with child care institutions. Modifications will be made to the State grant in 1992, due to an anticipated rise in the number of immigrant and refugee children in the municipalities.

Research and development

Child care has for some time been a priority research area. Since 1984, the annual state subsidy to child care has included money for local development and renewal work. The sum allocated for this purpose is SEK 14,5 million for the financial year 1991/92. Around 1,000 projects have been granted research money over the past seven years.

Examples of common projects are those concerning developments in the internal work of the pre-school, for example how to help new children to settle in, cooperation with parents, how to stimulate language and motor skills. Other areas to be given priority have been cooperation between pre-school and school, cooperation between the leisure time centre and school, child care at night and during unsocial working hours, and the development of new forms of care for schoolchildren between the ages of 10 and 12.

The National Board of Health and Welfare has developed a computerised data base holding details of current research and development projects in the field of child care.

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